

Daniel Pearson
State Director for Educators for Excellence-Connecticut
dpearson@e4e.org
203-313-0863
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Supporting Bill SB2

Co-Chairs Senator Anwar and Representative Linehan, Ranking Members Representative Dauphinais and Senator Martin, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee.

My name is Daniel Pearson and I am the State Director for Educators for Excellence-Connecticut, a teacher-led organization with nearly 1,000 members statewide that seeks to elevate teacher voice in policy decisions.

Today I submit testimony on behalf of our members who are current classroom teachers and who work everyday to ensure that their students have the best educational experience possible. These teachers work with the very students affected by these policies and we urge you to support SB 2.

The consequences of COVID-19 are rippling through our communities further exacerbating the inequities in our education system and putting incredible pressure on educators and students to navigate the uncertainty of remote and hybrid learning with very few resources.

This pandemic has shined a light on the massive opportunity gaps that exist for our most vulnerable students. We must develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate learning loss from this pandemic while also developing long term solutions to finally address the structural inequities in our education system. This includes, but is not limited to, enhancing afterschool and summer programs, highly focused and highly individualized tutoring programs during and after school hours, more SEL support and an investment in mental health professionals, lowering class size, and ensuring districts have the necessary resources to create and sustain these initiatives..

Our teachers have been working with other education advocate organizations to better understand and identify what student engagement looks like in practice. We recommend strengthening this bill by adding the recommendations provided to you by ConnCAN on clearly defining student engagement and disengagement. By having a clear definition, we can better assess the impact of our programs and have data that more accurately illustrates our students' levels of engagement.

It goes without saying that this past year has been incredibly difficult for us all, especially our youth, and now more than ever, we need to make substantial investments in our students' social and emotional well being.

SB2 is a step in the right direction towards deepening the social and emotional supports available within schools. It's long overdue for us to prioritize the social and emotional well being of our students, teachers, and mental health professionals, and we urge this committee to vote in support of this bill.

E4E has nearly 1,000 teachers across the state and for years we have discussed the massive disparities in guidance and expectations from district to district and school to school. When COVID hit, these disparities were exacerbated as districts scrambled to create guidelines and plans to meet the educational needs of our students. Teachers and students were thrust into the unknown with mixed messages and constant change as the plan changed day to day.

As we approach a year of remote and hybrid learning, we have learned a lot and it is evident that virtual learning will be a part of public education going forward. That is why we urge this committee to pass SB2 with the enhancements stated earlier and create a uniform set of guidelines for virtual learning and ensure we invest in professional development for our teachers focused on remote teaching. This will allow all of us-districts, teachers, students, and families- to be better prepared for the next time this happens.

About E4E

Founded by public school teachers, Educators for Excellence is a growing movement of more than 33,000 educators nationwide, united around a common set of values and principles for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education.

For more information, please visit www.e4e.org